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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 000293

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2015

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA WANTS TRILATERAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE,
HELP FROM JAPAN ON EAS MEMBERSHIP

Classified By: J. Thomas Schieffer, Ambassador. Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: Australian Foreign Affairs Secretary Michael L'Estrange told the Ambassador on February 14 that he hoped another round of the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue could be held in the near future. He also asked that the U.S. encourage Japan to use its influence with ASEAN to push for Australia to be included in the East Asian Summit (EAS). It was in both our countries' interest, the Ambassador and L'Estrange agreed, to have an open and inclusive EAS that was not dominated by China. End summary.

Trilateral Security Dialogue

12. (C) Michael L'Estrange, who recently succeeded Ashton Calvert as Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), told the Ambassador at a February 14 meeting that he was keen to restart the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. The meeting Australia had hoped to host in Sydney late last year had been postponed due to personnel changes in all three countries. Although he realized that the new Deputy Secretary had yet to be confirmed, L'Estrange said he was concerned the process could lose steam if another six months passed without a meeting. Australia would not insist on being the host; L'Estrange would be willing to go to Washington or Tokyo. L'Estrange said he recognized that holding the Trilateral in conjunction with the U.S.-Japan bilateral security talks, as had been done in the past, was the most convenient option and offered the best chance of holding a meeting in the near future. The priority for Australia, L'Estrange said, was that another Trilateral take place "sooner rather than later" so that the process could become more routine and institutionalized.

13. (C) The Ambassador told L'Estrange it was his impression that participating in the Trilateral had made the Japanese more enthusiastic about the process. The U.S. believed it was a valuable forum for the three like-minded governments to compare views on the major regional issues and hoped the meetings at the Deputy Secretary level would continue.

East Asian Summit

14. (C) L'Estrange also raised with the Ambassador Australia's desire to be included in the first meeting of the East Asian Summit (EAS) to be held in Kuala Lumpur this fall and asked for quiet U.S. intervention to get Japan to push Australia's membership with ASEAN countries. Australia was eager for a seat at the EAS, but could not be seen as being too eager or engaging in "megaphone diplomacy," L'Estrange said. Singapore supported Australian membership, as did Indonesia, but neither was pushing the issue forcefully because of the traditional ASEAN emphasis on consensus, as well as wariness of China's reaction. L'Estrange said he appreciated Washington had its own issues with EAS and that asking the U.S. to weigh in directly with ASEAN would be counterproductive. Given the situation, Australia believed the best route would be if the U.S. could encourage Japan to promote Australian membership. Australia, the U.S., and Japan all had an interest in ensuring that the EAS was open and inclusive and not dominated by China.

15. (C) The Ambassador replied that he did not foresee a problem with us quietly talking to the Japanese and asking them to use their influence in ASEAN to push for Australian membership, which would be in all our interests. None of us wanted to see the Chinese dominate the EAS, the Ambassador added, and his sense was that Tokyo was also keen to have more like-minded countries in the organization. He promised L'Estrange that he would report Australia's request